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BOUNDARIES: THE SEVENTH WAVE

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B.A., Western Washington University, 1973

M.A., Western Washington University, 1983

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements


for the degree of


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For Edith and Harry Watson--
and any of their tolerance.

BOUNDARIES: THE SEVENTH WAVE

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HARRIET AND THE RASTAMAN

HARRIET AND THE RASTAMAN

Harriet was fifteen when she fell in love with Bob Marley on the television.

She was lying on the floor of the duplex she lived in with her mother, eating Doritos with salsa. Her lanky yellow hair hung midway down her back. The television was turned to channel eight when Bob Marley came sailing onto the stage, his snaky locks leaping around his face and his body like extra limbs or boneless arms. Harriet sat up mid-crunch. Bob began to sing: "No woman, no cry," he sang, "No woman, no cry." His dreadlocks bounced in front of the camera like a dancing octopus. His face was dark, lips drawn back over perfect animal white teeth, voice rude and gritty. He was the spider, the bogeyman, her love, her destiny. He frightened her at precisely the same time she fell in love with him.

A moment later Harriet's mother Ellen came home from work. "Turn it off," she said, plunking her briefcase on the table. "I hate that punk stuff."

"It's not punk," said Harriet, keeping an eye on Bob who was jerking in a kind of frenzied seizure.

"Whatever," said Ellen.

Harriet's mother had no husband. She and Harriet were supposed to be a team, to be friends, but often they ended up annoying one

another with periodic irritation and a dislike for men in general but not in particular.

Ellen took a non-alcoholic beer from the refrigerator and sank into the chair. "It's noise," she said.

Bob Marley dipped his head at the camera and threw his animal hair back high. "Everything's gonna be all right, Everything's gonna be all right," he sang.

Harriet's heart fluttered.

Ellen snapped the TV off.

That night Harriet read in the TV Guide that Bob Marley had died of cancer three years before.

*

At Harriet's school no one had dreadlocks. In fact, everyone at Maurice High School was white. Since no one had ever heard of Bob Marley, Harriet was alone in her new wisdom. She was also alone in other ways, as she wasn't a member of any of the prominent social groups. She was not included along with preppie-punks who wore black clothes but drew the line at safety pins, nor was she part of the hippies who wore clogs and long skirts; she wasn't a valley girl with their bright tiny dresses, nor a grot who studied constantly and carried brief cases. Harriet, by sheer fortune, had never fit in. She was further distinguished at Maurice High for being a virgin and her virginity turned out to be the main cause of her trouble with the sophomore counselor, Mrs. Fitch.

But wait.

Harriet had lived in the duplex with her mother who had been divorced since Harriet was four. After three and a half years of marriage Ellen had declared that she had "had enough of the cruelty of a man." The ex-husband had remarried within six months and Ellen sometimes felt sorry but it still took a long time for her to find her own resourcefulness.

After a year of crying, Ellen put herself into the local community college and went on into an administrative position at the social services department. During Harriet's growing up years Ellen had investigated by turns: EST, the Rosicrucians, the Bahai Faith, lesbianism, (Short lived: she discovered she was physically repulsed by other women), macrobiotics, younger men, older men, jogging, the nuclear freeze movement and Save the Whales.

Because Ellen believed that the best way to raise a child was to treat her as an adult and as an equal, Harriet was included in most of Ellen's classes, seminars and rallies. By the time she was seven Harriet knew the rules of Bahai, (no drinking or drugs but cigarettes were OK.) the lotus position of Yoga and the reincarnation of the philosophy of Rosicrucians. At the age of nine Harriet could meditate with her mother for up to fifteen minutes. She was, in fact, so good at meditation that her mother switched to macrobiotics.

When Ellen was depressed she sought Harriet's sympathy. If Ellen had a new boyfriend, Harriet's opinion was sought. But when Ellen was angry at her boss, Harriet was wary not to slam the doors or turn up the TV too loud. The upshot was that, by the time she was

thirteen, Harriet felt more mature than her mother. Even so, by the time she saw and fell in love with Bob Marley on TV, Harriet had not yet begun to menstruate and knew almost nothing about sex. Ellen had curiously neglected to tell Harriet "The Facts of Life." She assumed that, with all of her daughter's exposure to the adult world, she would figure it out. But Harriet didn't. When her eighth grade class watched a film of two young people discussing the facts of venereal disease, Harriet cried silent tears in the darkened classroom, thinking that they were discussing the facts of marriage and understanding finally why her mother had divorced her father so many years ago.

*

A few days after she saw Bob Marley, Harriet went to the library and checked out three magazines with articles on Reggae music and Rastafarianism. All Saturday afternoon and far into the night she read and studied about Rasta and Ganja and Jah. Sunday night, when Ellen was at a Save the Whales meeting, Harriet had her first dream:

She was in a vast white walled room. The light was clear and the room shimmered like a mirage or as if it were filled with water. The Rastaman entered wearing creamy robes. His black hair spun on his shoulders and down his back as if it were on fire; his face was as dark as the cool night outside. He came to Harriet where she waited and placed his hands on her breasts so the heat shot right into her heart. She lay down while his hands travelled over her body, easing and blessing her like a libation. The dark of his face comforted her

and after awhile he began to sing:

"Old pirates yes they rob I
Sold I to the merchant ships,
Minutes after they took I
From the bottomless pit,
But my hand was made strong
By the hand of the Almighty
We forward in this generation
Triumphantly."

When he sang the Rastaman's voice was deep and gravelly. Afterwards he undressed and made love to her; moving his lean gleaming-skinned body with the rhythm of the song. And Harriet felt ecstasy.

The next morning, when she opened her eyes, Harriet saw the world with a bluish edge. On the way to school the cars swished by leaving blue tails; in class the valley girls had blue halos, on the way home the houses were blue against a white sky. Harriet lay on her bed and thought about her Rastaman. He had been more real than a dream and the feeling she had had with him was unlike anything she had experienced in her whole life. She had vibrated with him, had felt as if she were enormous, as big as the universe. Even now, thinking of him, she felt a sag and a pull in her stomach and heart. Harriet took a strand of her lank yellow hair and began to twist it, tighter and tighter until it knotted and sprung from her fingers and up against her neck like a little mouse.

A few days later Harriet told her mother she was giving up meat

for Jah. She would only eat I-tal food, she said, which did not include the flesh of mortal animals. Ellen, privately pleased at Harriet's sensitivity to animals, and wanting to be a good mother, agreed right away.

"We'll give it up together." she said, "And margarine too. Do you know that they are still making margarine from whale flesh? Even after research has shown that whales are more intelligent than humans?"

Harriet didn't answer. She didn't care one way or another about margarine.

A few nights later Ellen celebrated their decision to give up meat by taking Harriet to dinner at a vegetarian restaurant. The restaurant was located near a big department store and was decorated with wood. The floors, walls and table were made of wood; the salt and pepper shakers were made of wood; even the forks and spoons were wood. Ellen looked over the menu and ordered broccoli, stir-fried with tofu. Harriet ordered zucchini with sprouts. While they waited for their food Ellen commented on the shoppers passing and Harriet worried about school. She had an exam the next day which she hadn't prepared for. Harriet had always been a good student but lately she hadn't been able to concentrate on her studies, what with the blue light and Bob Marley. She began to twist her hair, hanging it in untidy clumps, its natural yellow gone greyish. She wrapped a section around her middle finger and pulled it tighter and tighter until a small piece of her scalp drew away from her head.

"Harriet," said Ellen sharply. "When's the last time you washed your hair?"

Harriet started and the strand of hair sprang away: a tiny dreadlock. "Two weeks."

"Two weeks? What do you mean, two weeks?"

Harriet pressed her mouth and glanced sideways to the couple at the next table. "Mom," she said.

Ellen lowered her voice and leaned across the table. "Honey, you look awful. You've got terrible greasies."

Harriet thought about trying to explain dreadlocks to her mother but the couple at the next table were looking and she hated it when people listened to her conversations. She looked at her mother's concerned face and shrugged.

"Promise me you'll wash it when we get home."

Harriet didn't promise but when they did get home Ellen had a visitor, a man who sold Danskin leotards and who promised Ellen a free outfit for her aerobics class. He and Ellen went out to see the movie, "Flashdance" and Harriet went to bed. Before she fell asleep she wondered if the man who sold Danskins was going to be her mother's new boyfriend. She hoped not. He had told Harriet that his favorite book was Rambo is Coming.

*

For the first time in her school, people began to notice Harriet. In the girl's bathroom she was discussed by the valley girls and three preppie-punks in her homeroom complained to the teacher that she smelled. The homeroom teacher discussed the problem with the sophomore counselor who made an appointment to speak to Harriet personally. The night before her appointment Harriet had another dream-vision:

This time the Rastaman was naked. His body was as brown and smooth as a mud river-fish; his chest narrow, his legs long and nipples raised. In the dream Harriet was lying on a white sheet and when her Rastaman came to her she held out her arms for him to lay with her. Right away he began to sing in a voice like a muddy river-fish bubble song. Harriet held him firmly and his rusted voice entered her soul and his tree hard hips moved with hers. Once again Harriet felt released and expanded, as if all the sky and the world were beneath her.

When she woke in the morning and thought of Maurice High and the counselor, she felt dizzy.

Mrs. Fitch, the school counselor, pulled up a chair and patted its seat.

"Hello Harriet. I wondered if we could talk?"

Harriet sat on the edge of the chair and tugged at the waistband of her slacks. She had been loosing weight and her clothes tended to settle around her hips. She wondered if Mrs. Fitch was going to ask about her grades.

"Harriet," began Mrs. Fitch, pressing her long fingers together like the ittsy-bitsy spider going up the water spout, "Are things all right with you? I mean, are you having any personal problems?"

Harriet had a sudden vision of her Rastaman and smiled.

"Yes?" said Mrs. Fitch with an answering smile.

"No," said Harriet.

"Oh," said Mrs. Fitch.

Harriet looked at the poster on Mrs. Fitch's wall. It showed a young man and woman sitting in a field of flowers. The photo was out

of focus and smeary looking. Underneath it said: "Love is where you find it." Harriet thought about that, and about her Rastaman and supposed it was true, in a way. She wondered if Mrs. Fitch would understand about her dream.

Mrs. Fitch picked up a pencil. "Is your mother still working?"

Harriet nodded.

"What about your menses? Are they regular?"

Harriet took her eyes off the poster. "My what?"

"Your period. Is it coming regularly?"

"I don't have one," said Harriet, blushing. She suddenly felt ashamed, sitting there on the edge of the seat in the sophomore counselor's office with that poster on the wall and Mrs. Fitch's personal questions. She began to twist a clump of her hair.

"This is unusual in a girl your age," said Mrs. Fitch. She looked closely at Harriet. "You haven't been with any boys?"

"I don't know any boys," said Harriet.

Mrs. Fitch saw her chance. "That could be because of your hygiene. You've got to keep yourself nice and clean if you want the boys to pay attention."

Harriet looked steadily at Mrs. Fitch. Then she said, "I don't want the boys to pay attention. "

Mrs. Fitch stood up. "Well Harriet, I want you to promise me you'll try to be more concerned about your personal hygiene. Especially in the hair."

Harriet looked at Mrs. Fitch and then at the blurry poster.

"Good," said Mrs. Fitch.

All afternoon Harriet was disturbed by the conversation with Mrs. Fitch but relieved because it was Thursday; the same day her mother went straight to a Save the Children Meeting. Harriet would have the house to herself for several hours. The first thing she did after eating her supper of beans and rice was to undress. She pulled down all the blinds in the front-room and placed her newest Reggae record on the turntable. The music began. Harriet turned the volume up, hoping Mr Mayo next door wasn't home, and began to dance. Bob Marley began:

"Some say they see them walking up the street
They say we are going wrong to all the people
we meet
But we won't worry, we won't shed no tears
We found a way to cast away the tears
Forever--
Forever loving Jah."

Harriet tossed her clumped hair in a circle around her head, bent forward, then backward, opened her mouth, hollered the words to the song, swung her arms like a windmill and hopped up and down on her toes. She felt filled with glory. Her body hummed with the rhythm of the music and her heart sang with the passionate and poignant words. She tossed her hair, up and down, up and down, around and around until she was dizzy. She ground her hips, in and out, thinking of her Rastaman and his lean black dancing hips. She cried out: "We'll be forever loving Jah. We'll love him forever!"

She didn't hear her mother open the back door. Instead she closed her eyes in ecstasy, raised her arms up high and moved her hips like

a boat on the Caribbean tide.

"Harriet!"

Her eyes flew open. Her arms came down and in at her sides like broken wings.

Ellen stared at her daughter. "What are you doing?"

Harriet picked up her shirt and covered herself. "Nothing."

"Nothing? What do you mean, 'nothing?' It looked like something. It looked like something terrible. Where are your pants? And what about Mr. Mayo? Did it occur to you that he might object to this noise?"

Ellen was shouting and when the song ended her voice rang out loudly in the room.

Harriet lowered her eyes. She felt ridiculous.

A new song began: "She love to party, have a good time. She looks so hearty, feelin' fine."

Ellen made an effort. "Honey, is there something you want to tell me about?"

Harriet shook her head. She felt more embarrassed even than the time she caught her mother in bed with a boyfriend.

"She loves to smoke, sometimes sifting coke. She'll be laughing when there ain't no joke," sang Bob.

Ellen sighed and sat down. "I'm tired Harriet."

"A Pimper's paradise, that's all she was now. A Pimper's paradise that's all..."

"Turn that damned thing off!"

Harriet did.

"And get your damn clothes on," said Ellen, eyeing Harriet's

greasy, matted hair. "We're going to clean this stuff, right now."

Ellen made Harriet bend over the kitchen sink while she scrubbed furiously at her scalp: digging into the white thickened skin as if she were planting potatoes. Harriet, her eyes filled with burning shampoo, her vision filled with the rusted enamel sink bottom, cried long, silent tears.

Afterwards she stood before her bedroom mirror and watched in despair as her hair dried into pale, sweet wisps. That night she pulled and yanked so violently at her hair that it hurt to **lie** her head on the pillow.

Two weeks passed without a dream. In the meantime Harriet twisted her hair and studied Rastafarianism. She learned about Marcus Garvey, and about Haile Selassie who, when he ascended the throne of Ethiopia, was hailed the Elect of God, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Lion of the Throne of Judea; the living God on earth who would save his People from the Evils of Babylon and return them to the Promised Land of Zion. She learned that the true and good Rastafarian believes in peaceful revolution, in brotherhood and in turning the other cheek against the wicked Babylonians. At the end of the second week Harriet got her chance to turn her other cheek.

She had just put her geography book away in her locker when four girls surrounded her.

"Hi," said the first, a pug-nosed girl whose hair turned back all around her face like a sausage. "We'd like to talk to you."

Harriet looked at the sausage-haired girl and wondered why people always wanted to talk to her.

"We want to help you," added another, whose skirt stopped just above her skinny knees.

Harriet felt her stomach contract. She tried to remember the girl's names; she had seen them in her classes but their faces all blurred together in anonymity with their similar sausage rolled hairdos.

"We want to be your friend," said the first, "We'll show you how to fix your hair and stuff."

"But you gotta wash it first," added another, hastily.

The sausage haired girl said, "I can show you how to make yours look like mine."

Harriet closed her eyes and thought of her Rastaman. "No," she said.

"You could be pretty if you tried." said the short-skirted girl, "Really."

"No," said Harriet, "thank you."

The sausage haired girl made a face. "We're only trying."

Harriet thought of dancing narrow hips and shook her head.

"You'll be sorry," said another.

Harriet smiled.

*

That night he returned. They were in a vast field where large blue and red birds swooped over and grass bent backwards from a warm wind. The sea winked in the distance and the sun was hot and leopard-mottled on their naked skins. Her Rastaman sang:

"Don't let them change you,
or even rearrange you,
We've got a life to live.
They say only, only, only
the fittest of the fittest
shall survive,
Stay alive."

He traced a long hot finger over her dry body, down her cheeks and over the swell of her breasts which arched to meet him, along her belly which had grown big and tight like a pregnancy. And her entire body bent with his like two saplings in a hurricane.

*

The next day on her way to school and all through the day, Harriet had the blue light. In Algebra class the teacher vibrated blue at the blackboard; in the hallways rivers of students swept along in a deep blue halo. All day she felt her body still bent to his shape and her mind hummed and sang to itself. She was oblivious to the stares or snickers around her. She was oblivious to the world. And then they cut her hair and the blue light disappeared.

They had been waiting for her, the sausage-haired girl and her friends. They might have felt they were being charitable, not cruel, were they asked. They caught her in the girl's bathroom and held her with her back against the cold tile wall and when she gave up struggling and sunk down to the floor there was a chill against the back of her neck and she could see the rolls of toilet bases, round and white and marble from under the cubicle doors. While they held and cut she

thought, abstractly, the toilets aren't connected to the floor, they're suspended. But then the snipping stopped and her shoulders were released and her hair fell around her on the floor like dead fishes.

She hadn't cried or made any sound and now she sat, stone-like against that wall. One of the girls scooped up a handful of hair and held it out to her. "Here." But Harriet looked at her from empty eyes and the girl shrugged, dropped the hair and fled.

*

Later, in Mrs. Fitch's office Harriet heard:

"What they did was unkind Harriet but you must explain why you let your personal hygiene become so offensive."

Harriet lifted a hand to her head where her hair felt like a burned bush.

"We're only trying to help you," said Mrs. Fitch.

Harriet looked at the poster of the blurry people with all their hair and looked at Mrs. Fitch without the blue light. How long would it take to grow her hair back, she thought, and what would her Rastaman think?

"Harriet. You must cooperate."

So Harriet gave up and told. She told Mrs. Fitch about the Rastaman and the blue light and her dream which were not like any dream. She tried to explain about Jah and the cutting of hair but Mrs. Fitch interrupted with questions about the Rastaman. She was especially interested in whether or not Harriet had allowed him to have intercourse with her and did he climax. After her story Harriet could see that Mrs.

Fitch's attitude had changed; she was brisk now instead of solicitous.

When she arrived home her mother was there to meet her. Ellen told Harriet that she had skipped her aerobics class in order to take Harriet to the hairdresser. She said that Mrs. Fitch had called and that they'd had a long chat and, as far as she could see, the best thing to do under the circumstances was to get Harriet more serious credit for her information on sexual intercourse.

Harriet looked at her mother in wonder. What had gone wrong?

"I'm trying to take this well, Harriet," said Ellen as they drove across town to the hairdresser. "I hope you can see that. I don't intend to interfere in your private life, just as you've always respected mine. After all, we are both adults." Just before they reached the hairdresser's Ellen said, "But I do wish you'd told me sooner. I could have helped you. After all, I do know something about sex."

The hairdresser made Harriet look through some fashion magazines for a new style. When Harriet did not find anything, the hairdresser went ahead and washed, set and fluffed her hair around her face so that, when she finished, Harriet looked kind of like Princess Di.

"It's darling," said Ellen on the way home.

"Stay alive," whispered Harriet to herself.

*

After they cut her hair Harriet had no more dreams. At school she did her work dutifully; the valley girls told her she looked "cute" and she smiled, faintly. At home she no longer listened to her Reggae records: Bob Marley, Peter Tosh and Jimmy Cliff went into the back of her closet. Ellen was pleased when Harriet offered to help with the mailing of the

"Jane Fonda for President" newsletter. For several hours each weekend she typed, ran the duplicating machine, stapled and collated the newsletter. Ellen's friends were impressed with Harriet's sense of responsibility and with her feminist perspective. Ellen told them privately that she thought it was due to the fact that Harriet had been raised, since she was a child, "as an adult."

In June, when school was out, Ellen helped Harriet find a summer job. Harriet knew she could do newsletter activities now and that helped. In a week she landed a job in a lawyer's office: typing, dittoing collating and stapeling. She worked steadily and silently; if anyone spoke to her she responded in short, non-committal answers. The lawyer, although pleased with her promptness, was a bit disappointed: he had hoped to get a teenager with whom he could chat about common high school problems.

Her job with the lawyer lasted until August 31 when Harriet figured she had made over \$900. On the first day of September Harriet returned all her Reggae records to a used record store and made \$50.. Afterwards she made several important calls, including the Greyhound bus station. She asked alot of questions.

That night she lay awake for hours. Sometime in the small hours of the darkness she developed a minor cramping in her lower belly. When she arose to the bedside alarm of 5:30am, she discovered that she had bled on her yellow-flowered nighty. She found her mother's sanitary napkins with no problem and decided she liked the bulk between her legs.

In the end, it was the only thing that she regretted: that she couldn't tell her mother she had finally started her period. Ellen

would be relieved. But, she figured, as the bus pulled out from the dirty terminal, she could always write. In a week or so, after she got to Kingston and her Rastaman.

* All song lyrics are written by Bob Marley

MEL GIBSON AND THE MODEST MIDGET

MEL GIBSON AND THE MODEST MIDGET

I was thirteen when they realized I wasn't ever going to be normal. I think my mother knew for years but my father didn't want to admit it. "Give her a chance," he'd say. "She's getting a late start." My father was an optimist like me, although he was tall, five foot ten, and thought of himself as a real Adonis, especially after marrying an actress. My mum had been on TV, commercials and walk-on soap operas; she was pretty in that squeezed, clean way many normals have. My father wanted me to be big--a big star that is--and to make it in Hollywood. Fact was, I hadn't grown an inch since my seventh year in life. I was three feet tall and stay-put.

Now don't go thinking I was a dwarf. Dwarves are grotesque with bent legs like twisted little bushes. Mine are slim and lovely. Dwarves have huge heads like bowling balls and funny faces to boot. My body had classic prepotency, my breasts pert and budding, my hands small and tapered. My eyes are egg blue, my hair curly yellow, my lips shaped like Marilyn Monroe's without lipstick. My nose is tiny and turns up like a flower petal, my chin is delicate and firm, my cheeks always rosey; I am perfect. Which is why I didn't think it strange at all that Mel Gibson fell in love with me.

For one thing, Mel likes dogs. I knew this from an interview in Cosmopolitan. He has three dogs himself, all of them pure bred. I

know quite a bit about dogs myself as I groom them for a living. After my parents died, (On the way to the hospital. My father was taking my mother but he'd been drinking.), I located this dog-grooming job and since then I've learned a good deal to say to Mel. It gave us something to say, right away, during that awkward stage.

I first saw Mel in "The Road Warrior." My friend Harry took me and frankly I found the movie disgusting. Harry said it was only because I couldn't see past the two big normals sitting in front of me. I thought it was just the slutty women in the show. Even so, I was relieved when Mel cruised off at the end of the show...he didn't find any of them worth fooling with. On the way home Harry tried to tell me that Mel was a Hollywood type, the kind who only went after what he could get. I knew better even then as Harry's opinions aren't reliable. Harry's in love with me. He thinks I look like Jessica Lange. This is not very accurate as Lange has those big, spreading, normal-type hips while mine are trim but I don't argue with Harry. I'm not the type to argue; I believe that arguing is not ladylike or modest. Besides, Harry himself is not attractive. He has ears which curl away from his skull like brussel sprouts. From the back it looks like his ears are ready to take a journey all by themselves. Harry tries to hide them by smoothing his hair down but, inevitably, it falls away and there he is, big-eared for all the world to laugh at.

Now don't get me wrong about Harry. I like him. He helps me out in all kinds of ways, like reaching things at the grocery store or driving me places. He lifts me up if there's something to see and he fetches my mail when its been shoved all the way to the back of my box.

Harry is a good man and I appreciate a good man. He even went so far as to get me that job at the Lovely Lassie Dog Grooming Palace with his second cousin, once removed, fat Belinda. Later about her. Truth is though, dog grooming doesn't pay for hog feed. What I do is supplement my income with the money I receive from beauty pageants.

I always win. Almost always. I did lose once but the girl--a brunette normal--had been sleeping with the judges, every one of them. (You never know about these kind of girls who have voracious sexual appetites.) Generally though, my fine hands and willowy calves do it every time and I receive one hundred to one thousand dollars. In addition I get a crown. My cabinet is filled with crowns which are my most prized positions.

Anyway, I said to Harry, on the way home from the film, "How can you expect me to choose you over Mel Gibson?" This is the whole problem for me: Mel knows what a girl wants, Harry doesn't. For instance, Mel buys me jewelry: expensive rings and things which would make Elizabeth Taylor look tawdry. Harry gives me trinkets from Woolworths. Mel knows how to make a girl giggle and how to make her sigh. He knows the kind of flowers to bring her; Harry for crying out loud, brings me his step ladder! The worse thing is the staring. With Harry people snicker. With Mel they oooh and aaah. With Harry it's hiding behind their hands.

"Harry," I said once, in a gentle way, "Have you ever thought about surgery?" He hadn't. I thought then about asking Mel for the money to fund surgery for Harry. Mel would, he's like that. Generous I mean. With all his money he doesn't have to be. He'd give it to all the starving children in Africa if he thought they needed it which is

something that makes Mel different from other normals. Actually Mel is different than other normals in many ways. He's graceful for instance, while most of them are clumsy: bumping into things, tripping over their own feet or smacking those giant heads. Not Mel. He never fails.

So I broke up with Harry a week before the Miss America contest. He'd been a big help up 'till then. I'd had to buy a gown and he'd gone along so the sales-girls wouldn't think I was a child, but a beautiful girl who needed a fine gown. Before they had always tried to sell me these silly things: fluffy skirts with ruffles like on a pork roast, polka dots, bows everywhere. What I wanted was a slinky number, something in blue that would ease down over my pert breasts and drape smoothly over my perfect hips. The salegirls gave me those, "Oh sure" looks but Harry gave them a "Damn sure" look in return and they went in for a right gown.

Later, when Harry was driving me home (I hate the bus after that time the driver lost me behind a seat and took me to the wrong stop), I said, "Harry, it's just that I love someone else." I told him about my morals, how I don't believe in going out with two men at once, how I don't believe in leading a guy on. You can imagine what happened. Harry wept. Real tears splattered down his face and made a mess on his T-shirt. I felt awful. I can't stand the kind of thing--a man crying. It makes me feel weak inside like an old lady. I almost told him, "Harry. Mel wouldn't cry like that." I wanted to tell him about my passion with Mel, how he touches me all over in that rapturous way, how he kisses me everywhere, even in those embarrassing places. I

wanted to explain how Mel loves me in that complete way, even in the morning without makeup. How Mel thinks of me before himself, not like most men. How he tells me that I'm more gorgeous by a long shot than his leading ladies: Jessica or Sissy. I wanted Harry to understand.

But I didn't tell Harry. I waited for him to calm down and drive me home. I knew it would take him awhile to accept the situation. I knew it would take him time for his broken heart to heal. Once I got home I began the horrid job of hemming my new gown. Normal gowns are disgustingly long and gawky so that the hems trail after me all the way to the bathroom. I had a terrific amount of altering to do; you'd think someone might come up with a line of dresses for my daintiness. All in all I was pretty discouraged that night and didn't get much sleep which is what led up to that incident with Spike.

Belinda, my fat boss, had gone out for coffee and a dozen doughnuts. (All for herself. She'd got a rear like two hogs mating in a gunny sack.) I was left alone in the clinic when in came Mrs. Robust with Spike under her arm. Now Mrs. Robust is the wife of a doctor who performs abortions and she looks it: hair dooed, eyes lidded purple, long daggerdly nails clicking the counter if she doesn't get immediate attention. So, when the bell rang and I turned around, she didn't see me. Her hooded eyes slid back and forth and her fingernails clicked a John Phillip Sousa March on the formica. Suddenly she spotted me. "Oh my god," she exclaimed, "You're a dwarf!"

Well, you can imagine what contempt I felt for her. It was on the tip of my tongue to say, "Mel Gibson loves me ." But instead I said, "Does Spike want his bath today?" (Composure is one of my best points.) Mrs Robust displayed her funny yellow teeth. "Can a person like you

do such a thing?"

"Certainly," I responded coolly, and took Spike from her clutching arms. "He and I get along just fine," I added with a phoney smile. Now Spike was an ugly dog: smashed-in face, bottom jaw full of broken teeth, wandering red eyes. I watched Mrs. Robust go, that switch of her padded ass all the way, and turned my eye to the dog. He and I would achieve a compromise.

Spike had always hated his bath but he knew the boss in such a place as the Lovely Lassie Dog Grooming Palace. So he settled down and let me hook him into straps. Then he heaved a big sigh. I gathered the water straps, said "You ugly dog", he lifted his nasty lip and we were ready. Just as I turned away to turn on the water, Spike pissed. He lifted that bandy leg of his and urinated all over me! On my arms, my back, my legs!

Now I'm not one to take insult lightly. I lifted the clippers and rapped Spike right across the snout. Spike pulled back and bared his crooked teeth. I reached behind him and turned on the hot water. Spike snarled. I sprayed him in the face with that hot water until he yelped in pain. He knew I'd won.

By the time Belinda returned Spike was clean and I'd dried. I didn't tell her about my incident with Spike, for a very good reason. Belinda was always looking for a reason to fire me. She wanted to prove that I was inadequate for the job and frankly, it had been hard enough for me to find work. Truth is, Belinda didn't like me and I didn't like her either. She was a sour woman with one of those typical normal, overeater bodies: spreading thighs, a hog's ass, chest like a billiard

table. She envied me my delicacy and I knew it. Also I didn't want to give her any reason to fire me so I kept my mouth shut and said, "No thank you," to her offer of a doughnut.

I did, however, tell Harry. He called and when I told him of Spike's cruelty, he offered to come over to my house and help me clean the place. It was something he'd done in the past so I relented. (Besides he brought me the newest book about famous beauty queens). Harry was good at cleaning: first he scrubbed the back of shelves, then the stove top and finally the windows. Harry is a big man with strapping arms and, when I turned from the divan to watch him at the windows, his ears looked ready to fly off his head. That touched me. "Harry," I said, "you're a prince." I almost added that some girl would really appreciate him someday but I didn't and was sorry because the next thing that happened was he turned around and asked me to marry him. "I'll make you the princess," he said.

I wanted to cry. I do have feelings for Harry. There he was, arms akimbo, ears bolting, face all twisted. I almost said yes out of pity. But I think its wrong to marry someone out of pity. Mel and I both feel this way. Every week some girl asked Mel to marry her and he always says no; he thinks it would be cruel to marry a girl just because she adores him. Anyway, with Harry it just wasn't love. Affection maybe, but not love. I couldn't see the possibility of passion. With Mel it was passion. I'd touch his glossy black hair with my fine fingers and he'd go wild. He'd gaze at me from those sea-blue eyes and I'd melt right into the sofa pillows. He'd hold me next to his broad-as-a-house shoulders and it would be ecstasy for both of us.

There was no chance for Harry and I said so. I said, "Harry, I

have a great deal of affection for you but there is no possibility of passion." Harry caved in. He put his cleaning rag down, washed his hands and gave me a long, tragic look. Next thing, he left. Don't think I didn't feel bad. I did. But what could I do? In the end I just went on, hemming my gown and planning the future.

For the Miss America contest I practiced my aria. In those big contests they expect you to have talent and I do. Now some say the talent doesn't matter but it does and I can prove it. In 1958 Miss Virginia sang like a lark, in 1961 Miss Mississippi danced the pants off Ginger Rogers and in 1965 Miss Maine twirled a baton with a fire at both ends. They all won. Now I don't pretend to be able to sing like Barbra Streisand (who, by the way, Mel says is a real slut), but I do have a real nice high voice. Mel thinks I can sing quite well and I was planning to do the song, "Some Enchanted Evening." (Here's its joke: "Knock, Knock? Who's there? Sam and Janet. Sam and Janet who? Sam and Janet Evening!"), because I love the words: "Once you have found her, never let her go," because they are the same ones Mel sings to me in the shower. Mel can sing real nice too and we get into some fine harmonies at time.

Anyway, I spent the day practicing my voice on the last note, spreading my gestural hands like Ezio Pinza in the movie version. I was just at the end, where the words go: "And never let her a-go-o-o-o!" when the phone rang. Thinking it was Mel Gibson, I rushed over but who do you think it was?

Fat Belinda. Wanting me to come down to the clinic as she had a family emergency.

You can imagine how disgusted I was. Particularly since I would

have to take the bus. In addition I had been planning to practice my walk and the wearing of my casual outfit.(The judges like it if you can successfully wear something as if it were an everyday situation, such as a board meeting or an executive luncheon. I had planned a blouse and skirt--something like Sally Field wore in "Norma Rae" since Sally is so short and pretty for a normal. Besides, Mel had said she was real swell about things on the set.)

You can imagine how nervy I felt towards Belinda. Asking me to give up my day for her poor family. Still, I said yes, and when I arrived at the clinic she rushed out without explanation. I looked around until I heard a funny noise in the back and when I went back there who should I find? Spike! Still there and waiting for his doggy nail polish. Belinda had left the Scarlet O'Hara Pooch Polish and a rag and Spike greeted me with a snarl. I was sickened by the sight. Nevertheless, I set Spike up on the rubberized matt to keep him from slipping and sliding, placed the hip-strap under him and then attached him to the wall. So far, so good. I was just about to fetch the muzzle when it happened. Maybe the hip strap was too tight on his delicate parts, I don't know, but just as I turned back he snapped out that horrid, ugly snout of his and took a bite. Right on the soft part of my arm!

My God, I couldn't believe it. The nerve of that monster! I grabbed those clippers and wracked him on the head. He went for another bite but I jumped back in time. He tried to lunge off the rubberized matt but the hip strap caused him pain on his little deedle, thank god, and he stopped dead. I wacked him again, harder, and this time he fell into a heap. I looked at my arm: a horrid gash, as big as a string bean,

blood welling from it. I knew, without a shadow of doubt, that it was going to leave a nasty scar in my perfection. I knew that my arm was ruined for life, that my beauty queen status was ended. Without even thinking I took those shears once again and wacked Spike again, even though he wasn't moving.

I hated that dog.

On my way home on the bus I managed to blink back my tears. I didn't want anyone to see my crying, especially after the time someone called the police who took me to the station to call my mother. I was twenty-five for god's sake, and my mother had been long dead!

At home I called Harry who rushed over to bandage my arm. He was polite about it but we both knew the truth: I could never be a beauty queen again. Who would want a Miss America with a big ugly bandage on her arm? Who would vote for a woman with a disgusting scar? I cried. I had wanted to be Miss America so bad. Mel had told me he would buy me a swimming pool if I won and then even teach me to swim. Now I had no pool, no crown and maybe, no Mel. I was so depressed that I didn't even answer the telephone when Belinda called and told Harry that Spike was dead as a dog and I was fired.

Frankly, I just didn't give a damn. I'd hated that job anyway as well as Belinda and Spike. When Harry suggested I might be able to get a new job cleaning some rich normal's home I covered my ears. What an atrocious idea. And only Harry would talk to a girl about scrubbing when she's been a princess. That's Harry for you. I pulled the covers over my head and went to sleep.

The next morning, first thing, the judges called. They wanted

information on my vital statistics and then hinted that I might have it all sewed up. I tried to tell them about my deformity but started crying. Then I told them I wasn't going to make it, that it was off. They sounded bitterly disappointed and begged and pleaded, saying that the silly normals were always so huge and awkward. In the end they were practically promising me a runner-up position and I had to tell them some kind of truth. So I said I was going to marry Mel and things cooled immediately. Beauty queens are not supposed to be engaged; the most desirable woman in America should be dreamily available to everyman who wants you. The judges said "Thanks anyway," and it was the end like a bad light: an empty phone.

Afterwards I sat on my bed for a long time, staring at my gown all hemmed and hanging on the closet door. I thought about the Miss America crown with all those gorgeous rhinestones. I thought about the swimming pool and then about some ugly normal girl who would probably win that contest. I thought about Spike, dead on that rubberized matt. Finally I thought about Mel. No marriage. I knew that without my new crown he would lose respect for me. For intents and purposes, my life was over. Like Marilyn Monroe, I needed sleeping pills. Many. I could put a bit of rouge on and some lipstick, my best gown and glossy shoes, and lay down atop the covers. When they found me I would look beautiful and sad and they'd all feel bad. Even Belinda.

Then it happened. Life taught me its most important lesson: never lose your faith. The phone rang.

At first I didn't answer, thinking it was Mrs. Robust with a lawsuit. Finally, with courage, I dragged myself over and said hello. I

was amazed. It was William. William Hurt! He was calling to see if he could come for a visit. I'd seen him in "Body Heat" and thought a lot of him, although Kathleen Turner seemed the worst kind of slut. Still, I acted really coy at first but he went on to say how he'd always admired my delicacy, and my heart melted. I said, come on over.

I rushed around then, taking a perfect bubble bath and dressing in my short pink penoir. I sprayed my hair with that sparkle that Mel had liked so much and tied a lovely red scarf over my wound. I painted my fingernails with "Oh So Grand" and put "Evening in Paris" behind my ears. Then I arranged myself on the love seat and waited. When William arrived we went right into gear, finding all kinds of things in common. We're close now and I expect a proposal any day. William says he finds me infinitely more attractive than any of his leading ladies, Kathleen Turner or Sigorney Weaver. He doesn't even mind my wound.

DUST AND FLOWERS

DUST AND FLOWERS

On the third day the lizards returned. Slyly they crept through the open door: red and green ones and the black spotted giant. The heat burned outside my doorstep over the terrace; flowers crackled as they died. I spent my days watching the sea's face change and watching the village below: women in black, men in blue, the fish, the hawks, the girls in bright skirts, the fishermen. If I had been of a mind to fall in love I would have banged my nose on the split rocky soil. But I was a woman then and I'd come to the island to hide.

At forty I felt to be one hundred. The doctors had warned me of another possible lump in my remaining breast and I lay through those long first nights in my whitewashed shack over the sea, palm on my breast, holding evil things from its soft cone. There had been a time--a younger and vainer time--when I would have cut off my hand to be beautiful. But the string of failed loves in my life had depleted me of hope and now, one breasted, I had given up. Abandoned in my single room, dust and flowers at my doorstep, I was alone and monstrous.

For years I had allowed men to caress my breasts and arms and the triangle between my legs. For years I had believed that caressing was love and in the end had come away with an empty heart. With each man I had imagined a great passion, had closed my eyes to the weakness and created love between my thighs. I rode each man as if he were the

thoroughbred and love the million dollar sweepstake. In the end they were all crippled. As I was now.

My nights on the island were sleepless. The lizards slipped between my sheets, the moon invaded like a ghost and the laughter of the village drifted up. In the late winds the window over my bed creaked like an old ghost. I waited, hand on breast, for the return of the cancer. In the long dark I recalled that life. As a teacher I had failed; the students wanted provocation and thought me dull. With each year it became more difficult for me to keep them in line. When the cancer came I left the school without regret. At the same time the last of a dozen lovers deserted me for another woman. A man of the flesh, he couldn't bear my scar-crossed chest.

Full of pity, I waited days before visiting the village. Even then the bread man looked at me from his crooked eyes with undisguised disapproval. I looked away, as I had from similar looks; a woman isn't popular anywhere with only one breast. Back at home I chased the lizards from the hearth and faced the shattered sea. Nothing more. I waited.

It came with a new moon, an Arabian moon hanging over my home like a hook. The fire had died to a small popping of coals and my thoughts had led me back to childhood. I was just on the edge of sleep when my fingers, now familiar with the terrain of my chest, bungled over a new obstacle. I stopped and went back. There: a lump, a seed, a coal burning under the flesh. It had returned but how? Earlier in the day I had checked and found nothing, only the comforting smooth of the single breast.

My heart raced, pumping dangerously to the surface. I lay on my

back, blind with horror. The lump pained in an ebb and flow but my hand went mercilessly back, unable to stop. It seemed the worst night of my life. Worse than the first when I'd still had a few faithful lovers to console me. But what had been a nibble then was an appetite now; the cancer had gained its taste of me and returned for more.

I jumped from the bed, ran across the terrace and threw myself into the dust, wanting to roll the stink from my body. In that late darkness I tore at myself and wailed until the moon disappeared, until the songs from the village faded, until I was exhausted. In one of my moments of lucidity I remembered a story I had once heard of a woman who, upon finding her own lump and having neither the means nor the transportation to acquire a doctor, had found a room somewhere and spent the night removing her own breast. Rocking in the dirt I wondered, how had she done it? A piece at a time, like eating a pudding, or all at once with a long slash? Had she used a knife or a razor? Could I do it? Would I? I owned nothing more than a bread knife, as dull as a pencil. A dull knife and no courage would get me nowhere. In the end I found the bottle of wine I had chosen from the village and drank myself to sleep.

I woke late the next day. The sun was obscured by jagged clouds and shadows passed over. The sea below was jabbering and white. I moved stiffly and, with shaking hands, made my fire and coffee. The day passed with the rising of wind. The lizards slunk under my bed; a faint smell of animal hung in the air. Unused as I was to the light play from the clouds, I turned several times to the door, expecting to see a visitor,

someone unwanted.

I tried to eat but the food stuck dry in my throat. The bread was stale, the fruit mildewed. The grass outside my door lay flat from the wind. I lay down and tried to rest but my eyes flew open on their own accord. Finally, with the coming of dusk, I gathered my courage and touched myself in that terrible place.

I was as smooth and unmarked as a new birth.

I tried again, pressing now for the pain, for the seed. Nothing. I sat up in bed, heart racing. Had I imagined it? My fingers moved hastily now, scrambling across the flesh for that horrid lump. Under my hand the breast shifted and tensed, the nipple stiffened but no seed, no lump. Had it been a dream? The entire night, the hooked moon, the hot pain, the nightmare of my death? I clasped my hands over my mouth and cried out loud.

That night the bell from the village rang until dawn, almost as if--for me. Men ran to tie boats and women gathered animals. I slept fitfully and woke in fear. Now I didn't wait but touched myself immediately and received another shock: the breast was less. Where before it had filled my hand from finger to wrist, now it barely brushed the hollow of my palm. The tips of my fingers stumbled on ribs instead of flesh. The lump was gone and the breast as small and flawless as a young girl's.

I searched for a mirror, looking in my suitcase, (molding now in the corner) in the boxes above the stove, in the outhouse. Finding nothing I threw a sweater over my head went out into the storm towards the sea and its reflective powers. The wind rose hot and pushed against my body. At the cliff I turned and made a careful footing, clinging to

the rock's edge, gripping long grass and the flowers rising between rocks. On the way down that cliff the roar of the sea frightened me. My hands bled and my time seemed forever. At the bottom I gathered my sweater against me and fought my way to the water's edge. The wind was fierce but every so often the sun burst between the clouds so that, as I waded, there were long flashes of my length, stretching away. In my reflection the hair flew off in great matts, my shape changed from that of a monster to that of a midget; there was nothing to know me by.

The storm lasted three days and three nights. Its wind whirled up the hill, scorching the cliff face and blasting my home like a demon. Its howling made my own dreams feeble and mortal. Its rains took the last of the whitewash from my walls and made rivers of my terrace. I tried to keep a fire going but the blasts from the chimney sent smoke into the room and sent me choking into the rain. In the end I crawled into my soggy bed and waited, drifts of sleep and nightmares my only company. Charles, the last of my dozen lovers, came at me with knife which turned, in the wind, into a rose. Being a perfectionist, he then wept at his own weakness and asked for repentance. He received nothing.

On the third morning, when the storm had passed, my chest was as hard and flat as the goatherd son's.

After the hot wind and blistering rain, I settled my room, washed and combed my hair and opened the windows for warm breezes. In my suitcase I found a dress which hung on me, wrinkled and flappy like a slave dress. I smoothed it as best I could, pulled my hair into a band and set out for the village. On my way down the trail, picking over

deep cuts in the soil, I thought again of Charles. What would he say, seeing me now, he who had wanted me to be always fresh, always round, always soft and accessible? But here I was, a flappy woman, picking her way between the cuts like an old harpy.

The village this time caused me awkwardness about my new shape and I found myself grinning in a silly way and crossing my arms over my odd chest. Still, the villagers looked at me sideways; the grouchy old bread man gave me his sharp eye but responded to my embarrassed smile with one of his own, full and toothless. "The storm didn't take you," he said and nodded as if answering his own statement. The shopkeeper with the mirrors for sale chattered at me in a language I didn't understand and the girls who ran on the road called out in ringing voices.

On my way back up the hill I realized that the muscles in my face ached with the new smile and it seemed that the sourness I had expected from those villagers had only been my own bitterness. They had thought me a nasty woman, a witch, and now here I was: dust on my yellow dress, as silly as a goose girl.

At home I propped the mirror against the wall and undressed. The sight was a shock: but for the womanly mess of hair on my head, a slightly indented waistline and the patch of hair at my crotch, I could have been a man. The knife scar on my left side brought images of battle but the right side was smooth and hard, the nipple only a button against my ribs. There were no muscles; I would have been a weak soldier but my soldiers came away in a straight line like a wing. With the hips still padded and slightly curved, I was a woman from the waist down and a man upward.

I sat on the bed, stunned, my breath and self-pity gone with the shock. What did it mean; where had my breast gone? If I became pregnant would it return, blooming again like a bud? Or could I even have a child? If I had a man, a lover, would I fill out once more, like a young girl in love? Would my shape round again, like an adolescence repeated? Or was I doomed forever to this new goat-flat chest? I thought of the days when I had fantasized children with Charles. A sadness swept over me as I recalled those days of dreams, of a husband at home and babies sucking. But I didn't cry; my heart seemed reluctant and hardened along with my new body. Under the bed my lizards scrabbled and I rose, put the mirror aside and went to fetch firewood. To be hard.

I spent the last weeks of summer walking the hills. My thoughts skimmed along memories as summer gave way to autumn rains, as wildflowers bloomed for the last time and as my shoulders widened and my chest took on muscle. Charles changed in my memory. Gradually he went from bitter to sweet, from cruel to kind. Perhaps it was my work--there was much of it. Preparing for winter I oiled the shutters, polished the stove, replaces the wicks in the lamps. Every day I collected wood, gnarled and twisted pieces of Cyprus found only by wandering further and further each day. Once a week I went to the village for cheese, wine and whitewash. The bread man greeted me now with a ready grin, returned by myself with an apology. For some time I continued to cover myself with shapeless dresses until I noticed the shoulders tearing at the seams. The next week I bought a man's shirt--blinding white and wide across the back. The woman at the shop winked as she wrapped it, thinking, no doubt, that I had found a willing goatherd on my hill.

Near the autumn's arrival I went into a fit of frustration at my matted and snarled hair which the wind had tortured. What had once been my vanity, long and yellow, was now a horror: dirty as a dog's. Having no scissors, I used the dull kitchen knife, hacking that hair to my ears. When I looked in the mirror afterwards, I burst into laughter and the sound bounced off the freshly whitewashed walls. The following day I bought scissors and chopped what was left of my hair to the skull. For days afterward I enjoyed the bristle of it under the flat of my hand.

Now I found myself laughing frequently, scaring the lizards from their pre-winter sloth. The sounds from the village became less and the air smelled like smoke and decay. My dreams changed too. When Charles came, unbidden, I recognized his weakness instead of his cruelty. I saw the weakening of his shoulders, the slack of his cheek, the disappointment of his own life. Where I had hated his other women, his abandonment of myself, now I saw how unwilling to be loved I had been. Because of my vanity, I had never given the assurance men asked for and Charles had left me from fear as much as disapproval. When I woke from these dreams, I was filled with compassion. The summer clouds faded.

I moved through my days now as supple in mind and body as a strapping youth. My shoulders cast shadows, my chest filled and my body became as hard as the Cyprus I'd gathered for the fire. After a month or so my hair grew to a tawny gold, curled now instead of bone straight. Under my new chest my heart beat as steadily as a coupling rabbit's; nothing could make me happier than a lack of more pain. My skin went to dust brown and my eyes turned bright. My chin was firm, like a true storm. When

the maidens came to take the goats back to the village, trailing past my home with their hands to their mouths, I knew it wasn't mocking but coyness. They thought me a man, a boy even, as the change had stripped me of age as well as roundness. They thought me desireable, mysterious, not lacking in man-strength. When they passed, giggling like the rain, I laughed long afterwards.

The young men came also. They stared and winked and sometimes offered to cut wood or replace tiles for a cup of coffee. Sitting at my fire, they watched me covertly, once in awhile touching me and smiling. But that was all and I indulged them, enjoying their golden bent bodies with my own familiar mixture of desire and nurture. Although I was one of them in my strength, in my heart I saw them as a woman would: with tenderness, with forgiveness. Perhaps this is what kept them at my flames through the winter.

Sometimes I think about myself before. I remember the cups of breasts and the rounded belly. I remember the moments of grace in love-making and the pride I took in my body and its ability to please. Then I think of the loss and pain and horror. But where before I was circular, now I am tree-lean; where my flesh gave its liquid yeilding, its push and pull, now it moves hard and is fixed with muscle. I am no longer a lover of blood. Those which held years of bitterness almost destroyed me. Now I am free.

The maidens still come to cast their long looks. The boys, however, come rarely now as I am aging. The bread man has long since died. I live a simple life. In the morning I wake with the first light and, by the

time the sun has slipped over the window sill, I am at the fire, stirring my coffee. The lizards wait for my breakfast crumbs; the spotted one a king now. My woodpile reaches the eaves on two sides of the cottage. I know the land for miles around: each bush, each flat rock for sitting, the birth and death of each wicked wildflower.

NORMAN AND THE ANARCHISTS

NORMAN AND THE ANARCHISTS

Norman, after four weeks of discouraging phone calls, responded to Ruby's throaty voice.

"Are you guys politically conscious?" he asked her, closing his eyes. He had had it up to here with households looking for roommates who were either non-smokers or non-meat-eaters or supporters of people like Jane Fonda for president.

"Hell no," laughed Ruby, "we're anarchists."

"Anarchists? Does this mean you support a communal type situation?" Communal type was a situation Norman had recently learned to use.

"You could call it that," said Ruby, "or you could call it something else too. Anything else."

Before this month of phone calling Norman had invented a perfect communal type situation: a place where people supported one another, where they sat up late watching old movies like "Singing in the Rain," where they ate popcorn and made sardonic comments like Doonesbury characters. So far nobody seemed interested in any of this unless Norman was gay or in danger of extinction.

"I'd like to check out the place," he told Ruby.

And a week later he moved in.

Norman had been divorced for four months. Elaine had left after

seven years of marriage, snorting when Norman suggested their problems might be the four-year itch. Elaine was a lawyer for a civil rights activist and had strong ideas. She couldn't bear that Norman wasn't interested in city politics or in the rights of oppressed peoples. All in all she felt Norman was selfish. Still, she nagged him until he agreed to try; he joined the People Supporting Grape Pickers in order to Save the World. He went to weekly meetings but complained to Elaine that no one really attempted to talk to him after the meetings. Instead they snacked on bagels and tea. He told Elaine that they probably knew right away that he didn't really care about grapes. As Norman saw it, life was tough enough for a normal American white male without complicating it with other people's problems.

In any case Norman felt he was doing his problem for the oppressed by working in a day care center where scores of the kids were black. He was a good teacher, patient and humorous. He had told Elaine that his job was politically correct: he was not only breaking the sexual barrier but was interacting successfully with minority children. Still, after seven years, his marriage to Elaine was as flat as a legal brief. His wife's intelligence had long since stopped stimulating him and her aggravation exhausted him. When she finally left he was devastated for a month, but then, only depressed. His primary problem became: what to do next?

First, Norman joined a therapy group. He told them he felt all confused about his life style. They suggested a communal type place where he could live with new people, get to know some different type of folks, meet some nice women. Norman thought about it and decided maybe they were

right. So, with a cheerful heart, he scanned the classifieds. It wasn't until after number twenty, the ad which asked him to be willing to give up his own room if a family from El Salvador arrived, that he closed his eyes with disgust.

Five people lived in the anarchist house. Ruby with the throaty voice, Bob and his daughter Tibet, the blind couple. Norman was given the bedroom next to Ruby's--an idea pleasing him. It took him all of Saturday to move his stuff: the Cuisnart, the hand blown goblets (Elaine took the carafe), the full set of sterling flatware (Elaine took the cutting knives), the hand crafted casserole baking dishes (Elaine took the plates), and his collection of Maxfield Parish framed prints (Elaine hadn't like them). He had to make five trips from his old apartment since his VW held almost nothing. At his final load, with the JVC stereo component and his new TV, Ruby followed him into his room.

"Materialism," she said, pointing to his new JVC system, "American's need for technological music systems is a symptom of bourgeois materialistic crap." Norman looked at his system. He had saved for months to buy it and now loved it almost more than he'd loved Elaine those last few years.

"People just rely too much on technology to hear a real sound," Ruby continued. She flopped down on Norman's fouton bed and shifted into a comfortable position.

"Yeah," replied Norman, "you might be right." He looked at Ruby's "Authority Stinks" T-shirt and her long, white-blond hair. He wondered if she slept with Bob. "You down on authority?" he asked.

Ruby laughed her long, throaty laugh. "Hell I was raised without it! My dad was a writer and my mom a schizophrenic. We lived in Harlem. So it comes natural to me. That warning of authority."

"Oh," said Norman. He'd never met a girl with a story like this and his heart loosened a bit. "What did your dad write about?"

"Things. Authority mostly. He hung out with famous poets. Charles Bukowski, people like that."

Norman didn't know Charles Bukowski but he grinned anyway. Ruby tossed her hair over her shoulder and he noticed how her breasts had been left free to jiggle under her T-shirt. "What does Bob do?"

"Oh he runs the anarchist book store. Downtown. He organizes anarchist poetry readings too. He's the biggest anarchist in the entire city."

So Bob was some guy, thought Norman. He wondered what an anarchist poet would write. "How old is his daughter?"

Ruby lifted her legs onto the bed. "Tibet's eight, going on twenty-five. She's cool. You know she's never been to school?"

"No? How did she learn to write. And learn stuff?" Norman hoped Ruby's feet were as clean on the underside as they were on top. He did have new sheets. Designer sheets.

"She's been reading adult literature in the store since she was five. She's what you'd call precocious."

"What about her mom?"

"Oh, I don't know. Maybe she died. Or a divorce."

Norman thought about some of the kids at the day care center where he worked. The precocious ones were always obnoxious. Their parents, especially single ones, were worse. "Yeah," he said.

Ruby suddenly dropped her feet and stood up. "Somebody's cooking dinner. You'll be here?"

Norman nodded.

Ruby padded to the door and then turned around. "You're cute," she said and laughed again.

As Norman began to fix up his room he felt nice. Ruby was pleasant. More pleasant than Elaine in some ways. He felt good about placing his posters on the wall. At home Elaine had made him stuff a lot of things in the cupboard because she couldn't stand them.

By the time he was finished Norman caught an interesting food smell. He closed the room door and headed down the hall. But at the kitchen he stopped, amazed at the blind couple and their frequent bumping into one another. They rummaged in the cupboards and sifted odd things into the big, steaming pot on the stove. Norman watched them provide cabbage and cheese, tofu and apples, raisins and flour. The woman hummed and stirred while the man sprinkled spices. They were both thin with wandering eyes; neither of them wore dark glasses.

Norman spoke up. "What are you cooking?"

"For God's sake!" the woman shrieked. She dropped her spoon.

"Hell," said Norman, "I'm sorry."

"No sweat," said the man, holding out his hand. "It's anarchist soup."

Norman shook the hand. "I'm Norman."

"Phillip," the man said, "my wife's Adrian."

Norman thought about saying something else, like how nice the soup smelled but it didn't so he didn't either.

"Bananas?" the woman asked him, looking in the wrong direction.

"Sure," said Norman, thinking she must mean him.

"Good," she said and sliced several into the soup.

At dinner that night each person was served an enormous bowl of anarchist soup. No one ate except Norman and the couple, who had two bowls each. Tibet, the brilliant girl with the dirty hair, said, "Yuk." Bob did not reprimand her. Ruby leaned back and lit a cigarette. After awhile Bob left the table. Norman kept eating the soup, thinking it was especially important to be polite to blind people. While they spooned up they told him about how they'd met at the Colombia University where they both worked on a thesis about anarchism in Sri Lanka. Just as Norman was wondering how they made a living, they informed him that they worked in Bob's book store.

"But people always cheat them on change," piped up Tibet, "especially since they're Jews."

Norman stared at her. At work he would have punished her. She stuck her tongue out. The blind people helped themselves to another bowl of soup, spilling liberally on the table. Ruby rolled herself another cigarette. Norman suddenly felt exhausted.

That night Norman rolled in his bed like an old dog. His stomach churned dangerously; his sheets wrapped themselves around him. About midnight he got up, put on his Scottish tartan wool robe and padded down the hall in bare feet. He hoped to find some Alka Seltzer. He turned and headed towards the living room but suddenly something dark and alien loomed

Up before him and, before he could stop, Norman smashed into it and knocked it over.

"Shit," he whispered, switching on a light. He stared. The table he had hit was in the center of the room, right next to the sofa which had been by the window when he went to bed. Everything was changed. Norman rubbed his injured skin. He bent over to raise the table when he saw the horror: on the floor lay the broken pieces of one of his precious blown wine goblets. Someone had used it and left it on the table! It was part of the same gift he and Elaine had received for their wedding! Part of the collection of eight! Norman felt like crying. Gently he knelt down and picked up each piece. There was no hope.

The next morning Norman rose early and slipped into the kitchen. He pulled a chair to the cupboards, reaching the highest one, and replaced the remaining blown wine goblets as far back as he could. When he was finished, he noticed the filthiness of his sleeve: it was dark with grime. Norman felt disgusted. All the shelves were this way and not only that but completely disorganized. Norman rolled up his sleeves and began a major change. He placed the big plates on top, the small ones and bowls in the middle, glasses and mugs on the bottom. He stood back and observed. Not quite right. He moved the large plates to the middle but just as he was shoving them back he noticed a splotch of food on the top one. Green splotch. He lifted the plate. They were all dirty! Crumbles and greasies! Smears and blotches!

Norman couldn't believe it. How could anyone do such a pathetic washing? At his own home he had always been the one to wash, just to

make certain that each plate ended spotless. It must be the blind couple he thought, as they seemed to be the kitchen pair and how would they know when the plates were clean? Norman sat down, thinking. Could he mention it to them? It might be pretty rude to say, "Hey, why don't you do the dishes properly?" or "Hey, why don't you let someone else do the dishes? Someone who can see." Non-anarchistic, he thought. Of course, he could start doing them himself but six people a day?

Right then Ruby walked into the room, yawning. She still wore her "Authority Stinks" T-shirt and not much else.

"Morning kiddo," she said and leaned into the referigerator.

"Morning. Hey Ruby, what's going on in the living room?"

"Too early. Nothing's going on."

"I mean about the furniture. I came down last night and injured myself."

Ruby reached the back of the bottom shelf and found her carton of Raspberry Kieffer. "Well, I rearrange."

"You do?" said Norman, watching her open the Kieffer. "What for?"

"For the hell of it. For a gas. To avoid habituality. It's an anarchistic goal." She tipped her head back and swallowed the Kieffer in long, great swallows. Her throat bobbed up and down. Her chest jiggled back and forth.

"Well I almost broke my leg," said Norman, weakly.

Ruby finished the Kieffer and tossed the carton into the sink. She smiled at Norman and scratched her left breast. "Loosen up Norm."

Norman thought about Ruby all the way to work. He wanted to know her better. He wondered where her legs might end and thought of her in

her T-shirt with her breasts jiggling underneath. Would she have tiny pink nipples like Elaine? Or would she have those brown plug-type ones like that cheerleader he once knew? He liked the pink ones, like gum-drops. He hoped she had those. He needed to loosen up like she said.

Norman looked forward all day to his therapy group. He couldn't wait to tell them about his new house and about Ruby. When his long day was ended, and he finally sat on the therapy circle floor, he described Ruby rearranging the furniture. "Compulsive rearranging is an indication of the desire to have complete control over your life," agreed the therapist. "She may want a husband and children but be unable to admit it to herself." Norman tried to imagine Ruby with children but couldn't. He could, however, imagine her in bed. He smiled to himself. "Ask her to a film," said someone, "an art kind of film."

So, the next day Norman asked Ruby if she wanted to see the latest Bergman film. Ruby was on the rearranged couch, smoking. She stretched her long leg out and eyed it critically. "When?"

The movie was long and full of symbolism. It moved Norman to tears a few times, especially the parts between the boy and his mother. He wondered if Ruby was thinking of her own crazy mother. Afterwards, while they headed to the bus stop, he snuck a peek at her face. She was busy lighting a joint.

"Wasn't it sad when the boy's mom almost died?" he asked.

"Maybe for you, but frankly I thought it sucked."

Norman was taken aback. "Why?"

"Oh that nuclear family with pretentious, capitalist tradition.

The father's authority. Partisian hogwash. I think Bergman's gone right wing."

Norman felt feeble. "Maybe he was just trying to tell a story. Not to make a political statement."

"All creative statements are political statements, Norman. You're not an artist or you'd know that."

Norman felt suddenly ashamed of his sentimentality. Ruby sounded a little like Elaine. He'd thought of putting his arm around her shoulders but now decided against it. He wondered if he ever would see the top of her long legs.

By the end of his third week in the anarchist house, Norman began to feel he had most things under control. He had learned to clear his throat before entering a room where the blind couple wandered, and he remembered to discreetly inspect the rim of any glass before taking a drink. He learned to ignore Tibet at dinner and not to be surprised or upset when the blind couple smashed their legs on the rearranged furniture. Unfortunately, however, he still found no intimate area with Ruby.

Still, one evening he sat with Ruby and Tibet in the living room. Tibet was watching "Starsky and Hutch" on his TV. She had convinced her dad to convince Norman to move it from his room. Ruby was sitting at the opposite end of the couch from Norman, rolling a joint. Norman was thinking that, if he were a dad, he'd never let his daughter watch that violent kind of TV show. He said as much to Ruby.

She passed him the joint. She looked nice in a different T-shirt. "Kids need to decide what's wrong and what's right. " she said.

"Sure. But what if they decide the wrong thing?" asked Norman,

taking a deep drag from the joint. The smoke pinched his throat.

"Oh Norman, right and wrong are capitalist, bourgeois hangups."

Norman glanced at Ruby's feet which she had moved close to his thigh. They too were long and shapely. "But what if kids decide that violence is right?"

Ruby laughed. "Most people have already decided that. Even when they're told they're not right. You'll never be a fine anarchist Norm, you're too much of a traditionalist."

Norman felt the marijuana expand in his lungs. He felt a little buzz, right in the middle of his forehead. He liked Ruby's laugh, at his own expense. "It's the way I was brought up," he giggled, "not like you."

They finished the joint and Norman felt fine. Ruby's feet stayed by him like a promise. After awhile Tibet got bored with "Starsky and Hutch" and left the room. Norman wondered what kind of mother Ruby would make. Elaine had never wanted kids. "When I was married..." he began

"You? Married?"

Norman grinned. "Seven years."

"That's cute Norm. And so typical."

"Of what?"

"Marriage. The whole bizz."

"Well, my typical wife Elaine hated it when I watched TV. She said only idiots watched things."

"Preoccupation with status. What did she do instead?"

"Oh, read books. Or at least she said she did. She'd go off to the bedroom with a big stack, books by Gulag Archipelago and serious readers. Then, when I came in later she'd be sound asleep with the light on."

Norman remembered Elaine with all her books stacked around her like teddy bears. It had made him angry once but now, with the buzz in his head and the delicate toes of Ruby right beside him, it seemed like part of a long gone past.

"Elaine sounds like a real drag."

Norman hesitated, feeling a sudden twang of loyalty. After all, she had been his wife. "Well, I guess she was. Kind of," he said, finally.

"You're something Norm," said Ruby in what seemed to be a flirtatious way.

"Well, my counselor says I married Elaine to replace my mother. You know, that replacing childhood kind of stuff."

"What kind of stuff?"

"They say you have tapes, from childhood, and you play them over and over as an adult. My counselor thinks my mother bossed me and so did Elaine."

"Like how?"

"Oh like underwear. My mother used to nag me about the stuff. Were they clean, were they ironed, were they big enough."

"Big enough?"

"Yeah. She worried that if they were too tight they'd make me sterile."

Ruby burst out laughing and her feet jiggled.

Norman laughed too and put his hand on Ruby's jiggling feet.

Ruby stopped laughing and pulled her feet away.

Norman flushed and said, "Sorry."

"No prob," said Ruby, "it's just that I don't like being touched if I'm not involved with the guy."

Norman tucked his hand under his leg and thought, how could a guy become involved if he couldn't touch until he was already touching?

A silence stretched until Ruby yawned elaborately. "I'm heading for the sack Norman. Got to do glass-recycling tomorrow. Want to help? I've got to do green and brown."

Norman looked at Ruby's face as it stretched into another long-mouthed yawn. Green and brown. "Sure," he said, flatly.

That night he thought about what Ruby might mean by being involved.

It happened that Norman loved his morning showers almost more than anything in the world. He felt as if they prepared him optimistically for the arriving day. He loved the water, hissing over his skin, draining down his belly and tickling his toes. He loved how the steam and heat made him feel brute-like under protection of the frosted cubicle.

For years Norman had a routine, a perfectly developed routine: he would take off his glasses and place them carefully above the sink. He would turn on the shower, as hot as it could go, and collect the razor, the shampoo, the baby oil, the soap and the conditioner. Inside the cubicle those rivulets would ooze over his face, soaking his hair, then tickle down his neck. He'd think about naked primitive men in the jungle and naked women too. On the morning after Ruby and the green and brown incident, Norman stood in the shower and thought about his experience so far in the anarchist house. In general he felt mostly good. His chances of becoming a truly cooperative person were excellent. After all, he really didn't mind that two of his twelve pieces of flatware were missing or that his TV was in the living room. He'd even gotten used to the food on glasses or the smears on plates. He smiled to himself and reached for

the soap. Damn, it was gooey! It slipped from his hand and into a cubicle corner. Norman scooped down on his knees, but what? He couldn't believe what he found! Grunge! Everywhere! All along the corners and edges of the shower, as black as if it were a big snake. It was a grungy filth of dozen's of shower takings; Norman couldn't believe it. Another place of un-cleaned dirt and he'd have to take care of the situation.

Leaving the shower roaring, Norman found a sponge and a can of cleaner and returned to scrub. By his best effort the filth took forever to get rid of. Hair, filth, you-name-it, he thought, and kept working. After a long time though, he noticed a loud thumping at the bathroom door. He stood up, shut off the water and wrapped himself in a towel. Then he opened the door. Outside, in the hall, stood all four adults. All four glared at him, even the blind couple's eyes were milkier than usual.

"What the hell?" said Ruby, "You been in there an hour and I have to go pee!" She shoved past him and slammed the door.

"Yeah," said Norman, "but..."

"We thought maybe you were dying," said Bob.

"Or maybe died already," said Phillip.

"I was cleaning," said Norman, "the grunge and all."

Ruby came out. "At least leave the door unlocked so people who have to pee can get in."

Bob went in and shut the door. Ruby stomped down the hall and slammed her bedroom door. The blind couple looked elsewhere.

Norman was annoyed during his entire day at work. He crabbed at the kids. He felt that he should have been given credit for his work in the

shower. He felt the anarchists had been harsh. Fortunately, he had therapy after work that day.

"Be cool Norm," they said, "anarchisism is like that. It takes time to get used to other people's values. And cooperative living. It's like marriage."

Marriage? Norman thought. How swell. For the rest of the week he avoided most of his roommates. He lay in his room, listening to his JVC. At supper he said little and let the blind couple do most of the talk. Still, Ruby was always friendly to him, teasing him here and there, wearing a nice, loose yellow shirt. Her smile seemed to wear away his annoyance so that he surprised himself by asking her for another film. She said, "Sure."

It wasn't a Bergman film and even Ruby laughed. On the way home she let Norman place his arm around her shoulders, although when they reached the house she shrugged it off. Norman went to bed alone, feeling much better, but wondering if he'd made any progress with her.

The following day at work, Norman was exhausted. Two children at the daycare had chickenpox and a small black girl cried all day. Norman called and canceled his therapy group; he just wasn't up to the complaints of others. He was delighted when he came home to an empty place and went immediately to his room to find an Esquire. He decided to spend some peaceful time on the toilet. He always tried to save his bowel movements for those rare moments when no one else was home; he hated sitting there and then hearing a roommate clumping down the hall. His sphincter muscles

were especially sensitive: they needed silence in order to operate properly.

Norman settled himself on the can and opened the magazine. Ironically, it was an issue devoted to the divorced man and his success with a single woman. The heater in the bathroom hummed. Norman's muscle began to cooperate, and he knew things were going to work out. He prepared himself: he set the magazine aside and reached for a handful of toilet paper. He thought about what the magazine had said about the statistics of remarriage for divorced men. Some good ideas. His hand fumbled at the toilet paper. He looked over. Of all things: the roll was mounted backwards! Norman couldn't believe it: more irritation. His sphincter muscle contracted like a closing fist.

"Shit," he said and stood up, grabbing his shorts. It was just too much. That a person couldn't sit down with a handy magazine to take a good crap without something going wrong. Out came the front toilet paper instead of the back. First the snake in the shower: and now this ridiculous mess. Norman snapped his pants, flushed the toilet and headed for his room. He unpacked his typewriter and put in a clean sheet of paper.

"Dear Housemates, (he wrote instead of 'Roommates')

I'm sharing an essential idea.(he changed from 'important')

It has to do with the toilet paper. The toilet paper should be mounted so the sheets come off from the back instead of the front. This kind of decision is essential for sanitation, expediency and efficiency. In other words, no mess, no wrong use of toilet paper."

Norman read over the note and made a few more changes. He wanted to

be satisfied with the tone. He thought for a long time about his signature and in the end he wrote, "Yours in cooperation and anarchy, Norm." He felt this was the right kind of signature since it implied both camaraderie and a business-like attitude. He took the note to the bathroom and taped it right up above the toilet paper. Then he switched the toilet paper roll and felt much better. Afterwards though, he wondered if he was becoming seriously constipated.

Several hours later, Norman was napping in his room. He'd been having a wonderful sleep, full of dreams about the cheerleader he had known. The room was dark and silent and he'd forgotten all about his annoyance. But suddenly there was the old hallway thumping and then a knock on his door. Norman opened his eyes.

"Hey Norm?" It was Ruby.

Norman sat up. What was she doing here? "Come on in."

Ruby opened, then closed the door. She settled herself on Norman's bed in that same way she had when he first moved in. "You sick? You missed Bob's special dinner."

"Nah. Just had a long day." He wondered if he should tell Ruby about those sick kids at school.

"Would you turn on the light?" she asked.

He did. "How was your day?"

"Oh, it was cool. We made a bunch of money at the bookstore and a whole gang of capitalists wandered in and practically screamed at the book titles. It was funny."

Norman kind of laughed.

Ruby shifted and tucked her feet on the bed top. "Norman. There's something I've gotta talk to you about."

"Sure," said Norman. She's sweet, he thought, when she wants to be.

"I don't mean to be blunt but there's a problem here about anal retentiveness."

"Retentiveness? Kind of like compulsiveness? Do you have a little of it?" Norman giggled.

"Me?" Ruby laughed too. "It's yours that is driving me bananas."

Suddenly Norman remembered the toilet paper and the note. "Mine?" he said, "What do you mean about anal retentiveness?"

"Well, I'm discussing your obsession with order, compulsive cleanliness, attempts to control others' excretory functions. You know, people's shit routines."

Shit? Norman couldn't believe it. "You mean my note."

"Well, yeah. That and other things. We had a talk about it all at dinner. We're all upset with you trying to impose your own daily bowel movement on the rest of us."

Bowel movement? Jesus, thought Norman, its none of her business. "I was trying to be helpful," he said, suddenly wishing she'd get her feet off his bed. They were no doubt filthy themselves.

"Oh hell, Norman," said Ruby, "it wasn't just the can. It was how we found your bourgeois wine glasses hidden way over on the back of the shelf, how we saw you pick away at those microscopic pieces of food on the plates. We noticed you locking your bedroom up to keep us away from your JVC. You're uptight Norm, that's all we're trying to say."

Norman was speechless. That she could say those things! To him! He noticed that she was wearing her "Authority Stinks" T-shirt again.

It seemed to have yellow stains down the front. He noticed her breasts again, jiggling inside. Brown plug type, he thought.

Ruby dropped her feet and stood up. "We're not trying to be cruel Norman. We just wanted you to know the things which aren't good anarchist behavior. So you could work on them."

"Thanks," said Norman, "thanks alot. Should I do things like rearrange my bedroom furniture? Things like that?"

Ruby grinned. "Oh Norman. You're sweet. Really."

After Ruby shut the door Norman flopped back down on the bed. He thought about what she had said to him about his not being a good anarchist. He remembered her criticism of the Bergman film and her reaction that time he touched her feet. He thought about her body: her ankles were a bit on the thick side, even if her legs were long. He tossed in the bed and then pulled his cover up. Down the hall was a crash. Probably the blind couple, he thought, banging on some moved furniture. Or maybe it was Tibet. She had daily, nasty manners and her dad always ignored her. She was atrocious, not precocious.

He flipped over to his stomach. The vision of the shower grunge appeared. He thought of dropping that soap and of the snake and those people at the door. No one ever thanked him. Especially that Ruby. Still though, the worst of all was his missing flatware: even hiding it didn't work. The last time he counted, another was gone. He had no complete set; tears filled his eyes. These things had been a gift for him and Elaine at their third wedding anniversary and the missing ones were no doubt in the filth of someone's room--under the bed even. He'd lost them forever. He'd lost his wife too. For the first time in

ages Norman missed Elaine. At least she'd been an ordered, rational person. At least she'd known for Christ's sake how to put the toilet paper on correctly. Norman pulled the pillow over his face and cried.

After a long time, when silence filled the house, Norman sat up. It was late but he wanted to call Elaine. He wanted to find out if she was seeing anybody or if she missed him at all. He put on his robe, opened the door quietly and tiptoed down the hall towards the telephone.

Elaine's phone rang for a long time and Norman was just about to hang up when she answered. Her voice said hello in it's old, familiar cranky way.

"How you doing?" Norman said.

"Who is this? Norman? Why are you calling me after eleven? You know about my bad days. You know perfectly well that Tuesdays are one of them."

"Oh yeah." Norman remembered Elaine's bad Tuesdays. Today was Monday. "I was just wondering...how you were doing."

"I'm fine Norman. Especially if I get enough sleep."

"Sorry. I guess I was just wondering."

"Wondering what Norman?"

He thought and suddenly couldn't remember. "Just...how you were I guess."

"I'm fine. Just fine. And you?"

"Oh, fine too. So, you haven't changed or anything? "

"No, I haven't. Look Norman I'm tired. Real tired. Not up to talking. Too exhausted. You understand?"

Norman felt silly; the same old thing Elaine had always been so good at causing. "Sorry," he said, "yeah, I'm tired too. I'll let you go."

"Thanks. Alot. Goodbye Norman." Elaine hung up.

Norman stood alone with the phone in his hand. After awhile he placed it gently in its cradle. It was very quiet in the house. He could hardly remember such a silence. He thought about Elaine: he'd forgotten how many bad days she'd had. He'd forgotten how spoiled she was. Like Ruby: dirty T-shirt, selfish attitudes. He thought about Tibet and that father who never cared about her horridness. He thought about the blind couple and their dreadful cooking. Norman had a terrible stomach ache.

After he went to the bathroom for Alka Seltzer, Norman wandered into the living room. He looked around and then went to the kitchen. He flipped on the light and moved a chair to the cupboard. He took a pair of plates and spread them all over, onto each shelf. He took small plates and bowls and piled them precariously, topping with the biggest ones. He moved the glasses so some were up, some down, all sitting everywhere. Afterwards he found the cooking bowls and hid them in a paper bag under another box. Finally he opened the refrigerator and filled both tin drawers with extras: measure cups, spatulas, pan lids and cheese graters.

When he was satisfied Norman flipped off the light and returned to the living room. First he hauled the big easy chair to the center of the room. Then he shoved the couch over to the front door. He took the lamps and placed them on the floor, sideways. He put the tables in a big stack, right up in front of the window. He unfilled the book

case, placing the books everywhere: on the floor, on each piece of furniture and, finally, above the jiggling, stacked-up tables. He looked around and smiled. His stomach ache was gone. Tomorrow, he thought, he would buy himself a paper and begin to look for a new place to live. His own place. His own dishes. His own shower. His own toilet paper.

SEA BOUNDARIES

SEA BOUNDARIES

I

Things were all right until Laura began to lose her memory. When she lay in bed she couldn't remember what she had done after rising that morning. She'd pinch herself up in the corner of the mattress, as far from Bruce as possible, and test herself: had she gone shopping? What had she eaten for lunch? Had she seen "The Guiding Light"? and, if so, who had made a pass at whom? As months passed, Laura flunked the tests more and more often and spent a great deal more time in the bed corner, hoping her husband wouldn't want sex. She did comfort herself with the idea that, as long as she had the capacity to remember even a detail, things couldn't be all bad.

It began a year after marriage. Laura had never been the kind of woman who tried to be strong or independent. When she met Bruce he easily took over many of her responsibilities. He was good, she thought then, and kind. After a few months she married him. For a while he took away the loneliness she'd had for years; Laura had never been successful at making friends. They always seemed odd, strange people. She and Bruce had good times. Then he found a job east of the Cascades as a sales representative for Volkswagen and they moved. Bruce worked long hours and the loneliness returned. Laura knew no one.

Sometimes Laura would walk down the new street, hoping someone would stop her and introduce themselves, hoping for a smile. But things

went on without her. People whizzed past in cars or stayed hidden behind curtains. Laura considered a hobby but did nothing. Bruce arrived home late and exhausted. He'd eat dinner, tell her about his sales before the TV and fall asleep by ten. Laura would wake and send him to bed. He'd whine if she didn't join him so she did but the memory began to fade as Bruce slept. Laura would lie awake for hours, trying to remember.

After a few months Laura began to drive to the grocery store to buy magazines where other wives shared time with their husbands and loved it. She asked Bruce once, during his watching "The Equalizer", about wives and husbands, but he didn't answer: he often didn't during his favorite shows. Then, during their second year, Laura discovered she was pregnant. When her period disappeared she felt odd and when the doctor told her she was pregnant she was nervous. What would Bruce think? Would she love this baby? What if it was a great nuisance, something she couldn't bear, hour by hour? After supper and before TV, she told Bruce and he burst into a big grin. "Good news," he said, "Now you'll have your own friend." That night Laura wondered what he meant: the baby as her friend? or another woman with her own baby as a friend?

In the end she decided to become excited. Something new. Her own company, her own responsibility. She patted her stomach and glanced at her swelling breasts. She began to drive to the shopping mall to wander into maternity shops. The dresses hung over her but they were soft, pastel colors. The clerks were slow and kind and one even talked her into buying two new sweaters. She didn't tell Bruce. She hid them in the back drawer.

She wrote her mother and then Bruce's. She obtained pre-natal vitamins. from the doctor. She cut back on coffee and wine and threw up sometimes

in the morning. Afterwards she'd sit for long moments, hand on her belly, waiting for a kick, wondering if it would be a boy or a girl. Bruce was pleased and wanted sex more often.

Sometime in her third month, Laura lost her nausea. Her book said this was normal but, when she stood on the scale, she discovered she had lost one pound and then two. Days passed with no new weight and Laura felt odd. She'd turn sideways in the bathroom, imagining a puffier stomach, more swollen breasts. She'd eat enormous amounts of food--two frozen dinners, whole boxes of cookies. Then one day she found a small amount of blood in her pants and the next day, more. Laura was terrified. For another day she sat and forgot everything. Finally, at night, she told her husband and he took her to the doctor. The doctor examined her carefully then left the room, leaving her alone on the table. When he returned he told her gently that she had lost the baby. It was dead. It needed to be removed. Laura sat on the table and felt dizzy, as if the room was spinning around her, as if everything was white.

Laura's night at the hospital was ugly. When they took the baby away it hurt so badly she almost screamed. Afterwards she lay awake, alone, suffering each circle of cramps, wondering what she'd done wrong. An aspirin here, a glass of forbidden wine there? Dancing that one day to an old Gerry and the Pacemakers album? Or Bruce: was it his fault? He'd wanted to make love, even after her stomach bulged. How long ago had her baby died? Had she walked for weeks, to the maternity shop, up and down the street, without knowing of the horrible dead thing inside her? Laura turned her face. It didn't matter, she thought, what she had done or not. She cried. The doctor came in. Her baby had had a seriously bad heart. It

was a natural blessing he said. Laura didn't answer.

When Bruce took Laura home she refused to eat. He brought her pizza but she pushed it away. In her room she lay on the bed, pressing her empty womb. She hoped it would always be that way, empty. She wanted nothing inside her again. Through the night and the next day she ate nothing. On the third day, aching with hunger, she tried to calculate how long it would take to starve to death. Afterwards she rose, made a sandwich and returned to bed. She took two bites and threw it away.

Bruce had Laura's mother call but Laura wouldn't speak. He had his own mother call and Laura took the phone but said almost nothing. What could you say, she thought, about a dead baby? Bruce bundled her up in a jacket and put her in the car. Once, riding had been her favorite. Now, as they drove, she was silent. The bare hills made her sick, so did the people walking around...especially the ones with kids. She told Bruce to take her home but he stopped at a hamburger stand. Laura ate the burger he gave her, then at home went back to bed. She lay there for a long time, thinking about her life. She decided that dying was especially difficult, particularly with a husband.

That night she had a dream: she was above the sea, flying on her own, this way and that. The ocean glittered below her like a birthday cake and the flying lifted her heart high into her chest. When she woke Bruce was dressed and he saw her smile. "Getting up?" he asked.

After he left for work, Laura rose and decided to live. She felt better after the dream. The sun shone into her bedroom window and she thought that maybe things would be better. She might find a hobby or join a new club. She could become a better wife; she could shop and organize. In the kitchen she made a list of groceries. She organized the

jars in the pantry and wrote a long list of possibilities. A lot of jars, she thought, just in case of new friends. She cleaned the house and scrubbed the bathroom. She watched TV and re-read an old magazine. She ironed an old dress and put it on just before her husband came home. He liked that.

For a week things went all right. Bruce took her to a movie and, on the weekend, to a park for a picnic. Laura never spoke about the baby; she thought instead about the sea of her dream. Then one evening her cousin called to send her apology about the loss. Laura was polite but when she hung up she couldn't think of her cousin's name. The next day she went to the grocery store and forgot what she needed to buy. The same afternoon she couldn't remember her phone number at the bank. Out in the parking lot she lost her car. She stood helplessly until a man asked if he could help. She said yes, she had a yellow Vega but when they finally located it, the car was green. The man looked oddly at her.

Things became worse. Laura couldn't find the laundromat one day. At the shoe store she forgot what added to a dollar and wondered if the clerk was cheating. Then she forgot her own name. It happened at the dry cleaners. A cranky lady, filling out the ticket, asked, "Name?" and Laura forgot. She stared at the woman, at her big pores and puffy hairdo. The lady stared back. Quickly Laura made up a name and the lady wrote it down. Back in her car Laura sat in silence. What name had she given? Her own returned. She was relieved and began the car but suddenly she realized that she forgot the one she had just given. The car died. Now she wouldn't be able to pick up the suit because she'd forgotten the name she'd given. Tears filled her eyes. I'm crazy, she thought.

That evening, after Bruce came home, Laura said, "I forget things. All kinds of things."

"Like what?" said Bruce, turning on the TV.

"Colors, food, things."

Hill Street Blues was on. "Give yourself some time."

"Like what?"

Bruce leaned forward to hear what Renko was saying to the Captain.

"What kind of time?" Laura said again.

Bruce looked at her. "It takes awhile to recover. That's what they said at work."

"But I forgot my name."

Bruce pulled her down to the couch. "Don't worry. Things will work out. They always do. " He patted her arm. Something happened on the TV. "Look here. Renko was caught with a beer. In his car."

Laura watched. Bruce loved Hill Street Blues. He loved several other shows as well. He had the whole TV to love if he wanted it. She had nothing like that. After a few minutes she rose and went to the kitchen. She wandered into the pantry and counted the cans. Seventy-eight. That was nice. She wandered into the bedroom. She undressed and lay down. At ten o'clock her husband shut off the TV and came in. He rubbed her back. "Please?" he said. It had been awhile and Laura said O.K.. Afterwards he fell asleep but she lay awake for a long time. She didn't test her memory. She didn't think about the sea of her dream. Instead she counted the pantry cans, over and over.

The next morning, after Bruce had gone to work, Laura began to pack. The trunk of her car was filled with every pantry can. The back seat was

filled with camping equipment: rubber boots, sleeping bags, tarps, a big gas lamp. She moved hastily in case Bruce came home for lunch. (He hadn't for months but she always wondered.) Finally, over everything, she stuffed in newspaper, boots, matches and warm clothes. When she started the car she was trembling. At the service station her voice shook and on the westbound highway the radio annoyed her. She snapped it off and pushed the car to 80. She felt better passing people. By late afternoon she reached Seattle and on the highway she turned south. It began to rain. All around her headlights blurred, cars roared and then passed her. Red lights smeared in her windshield and the wipers snapped back and forth like a dog's tail. Laura kept her foot steadily on the gas and her eyes straight ahead. After awhile she turned the car west. The sky became dark, the trees roared up on both sides of the highway. At 7:00 she pulled over and fumbled in the trunk until she found a can of beans. "Green beans," she said, aloud, testing herself. They tasted nasty but her memory worked and she was pleased.

As she hit the road again the time became empty. The rain carved her windshield, banks of black forest hung over her, there were no stores or gas stations, no homes. Laura felt calm. Nothing to remember, nothing to forget. Halfway through the night she pulled off and leaned her head back against the seat.

When she woke, Laura blinked her eyes. There was a gentle grey-ness fogging her windshield and she wiped it with a cloth. To her astonishment, beyond the grimy hood of her car, lay the sea...pale in its morning way. The waves were fringed with lace which stretched all ways, endlessly, until hidden by forests. Laura sat for a long time; the roar of the sea drew her in and out until her heart beat in her throat. No

one knows, she thought, where I am. I'm a pioneer woman.

After a long time she started the car and headed further up the dark road. The sea disappeared and the road grew deeper. She went further, turned here and there, headed up roads stumped with holes. In the end she found a spot where a tree covered all places. Without thinking, she pulled the car high under the tree. Then she stepped out and began to dress for the sea. She filled her pack with matches, two cans of food, newspaper. She loaded the sleeping bag and an extra shirt. All the correct ideas came to her from those old hiking days with her husband. When she was ready, she headed out, facing the sea roar, miles away.

The forest allowed no light. Trees grew thick and dark and ferns covered the ground. The sea roar drew her and she struggled for what seemed like forever until, once again, she found its waves. On the beach she walked with joy, taking in each pool, each stream, each yellow wave. She went endlessly as the tide moved up and then began to fade back. She watched the clouds puff and move and she listened to the crows scream. When the day grew old, she chose a place just above the sand, on the edge of the forest. Eating cold spaghetti she thought of two things: tomorrow finding a home, tomorrow forgetting her past. In the end she slept in an old sleeping bag.

In the morning she felt bright and wished she'd brought her boots. She squished her tennis shoes and laughed. She splashed the pools but knew when to jump away from the seventh wave. She stayed always near the sea, wondering at its sound. Every so often Bruce crept into her memory but she pushed him away. He could cook for himself, she thought, as he did before meeting her, that day long ago.

After miles she found a new seashore, a place of high cliffs, pock-eted with holes. One cliff seemed larger and she dug steps to rise up. Inside the hole was a cave, a real one, going fifteen feet back. Its floor was lumpy but its wall dry. She went inside and moved through. There were funny shelves, small holes in the floor, high places. She thought about a pioneer woman and then found a sleeping place and lumps for all her cans. She found a low hole for a daily fire and places to hook a tarp on a rainy day. She sat at the edge and watched the clouds move away. The sky grew dim; she was hungry but felt as if she belonged. After awhile she lay her bag on the high spot, set her shoes near the edge and fell asleep in the dark. For the first time since she could remember, the night took her completely.

It took Laura three days to retrieve all the necessary goods from the car. At the final trip she worked for hours to disguise the car. She used mud and bushes until it was secretive under the fallen tree. Back inside her cave she stacked the canned goods along the ledges, arranging them according to meat, fruit, vegetables. On the higher shelf she placed her own personal goods: a mirror, a toothbrush, hand lotion and her hair brush. When she was finished she figured it out: two cans of food per day would last her for a month and a half. Afterwards she would find local food: fish? She didn't know. When she needed, she would know. At the end she built a hole near the cave edge for her fire and set her favorite can inside: chili. When it was black from the flames, she sat on the edge and spooned its contents. Perfect.

Afterwards Laura sat for a long time with her legs dangling down from the cave lip. The sea was moving and its dancing fringe came in and

out, over and over again. Like a faithful ghost, she thought. The smoke from her fire rose and faded above her head. The moon--a horse's open mouth--rose on the edge of the ocean.

When she woke the cave was as pale as a shell and for a moment Laura thought she heard the highway, roaring and swishing in the rain. As light gathered, she remembered her long trip: the rain on her windshield, the city lights, the snakey road. She remembered her first dinner of beans and she smiled: details had returned, all memories were a part of each day. That day she spent collecting important items she needed: clam shells left by seagulls, driftwood for fire and furniture. Water came from fresh streams a half mile away and the rope was found for hanging inside the cave if necessary. In the evening she felt she was doing just the right things a pioneer woman would do; she knew all the right things. In her cave she ate a can of spaghetti and added crackers. Then she laughed. Bruce had always loved spaghetti and she had always hated it. Bruce had wanted those canned vegetables and she had been disgusted by them. Now the thought of Bruce, her husband, was failing. I'm fading for him as well, she thought. I was a wife who wouldn't be happy; a wife who couldn't remember her own name.

II

Laura's life took on a tidal rhythm. The morning tide woke her and she would lie and remember the previous day. With light she would roll from the bag to make fire and coffee. Near the fire she'd strung a rope and hung previous wet clothes. With dry pants and a cup of coffee, she'd sit on the edge to watch the tide: some days it was miles away, with

the beach flat and slippery, reflecting the red or blue sky. If the tide was close she'd laugh at its attempts to reach her, to climb her stairs. Even so, the sea never frightened her; its foam was as familiar as the memories.

On brilliant days Laura would bundle and walk for miles among rigid hogs' backs, through the wide streams, around pools and along the tangled driftwood. Each day she found treasures: old plastic bottles from someone's ship, beautiful and homely shells for use or just for decoration at home, rubber cups, wire. Each treasure had its past and she'd walk, wondering. If she saw anyone else along the beach she'd give a wide berth, hiding. At the pools on her way home, she'd stretch herself over and laugh at the reflection. Somedays, warm days, she'd bend down and wash her hair. Other days she would fill the plastic jars with drinking water. On rainy mornings she'd stay long in her bag, staring at the dark sky, wondering about the day's tide. If the sea's roar was enormous she'd get up, dress and squat on the cave lip, wondering if the spray could ever reach her home.

Some days would pass with no sun and Laura would hardly notice that she had slept longer and dreamed more vivid or confusing dreams. When she woke the sea's roar was like a highway, the darkness like her past. Bruce would come and go, come and go but each time he changed to something more faded, more forgotten. Then the sun would return and she would see the animals far out in the sea: seals and sea lions. To Laura they slipped between high waves and made her silent. She felt they may become a kind of member, later.

At the end of three weeks Laura was sick of macaroni and cheese, of chili and spaghetti. Her bread was brittle and she tossed them to the

ravens. She thought about a pioneer woman, what she would do and then she thought about her old aunt Marion. Years ago Marion had taken her to the sea for a vacation and offered to teach her to dig for clams. Laura had been fussy and sulky and had refused; the idea was much too disgusting. Now, she thought, I'm a pioneer woman and I'll learn what I need to learn. On the beach she walked for hours, staring at the sand, trying to remember what she had once been told. There were a million holes, bubbly indents and as many dry, pimply places. Which ones? In the end she chose the wet pieces and found herself a flat slab of wood. But the clams escaped too quickly and she felt like a fool. The next day she found a thinner piece of wood and better holes and, after hours, she caught a clam. Her hand was bloody and hurt from the clam's shell but I'll eat him, she said.

In her cave she cut the clam into tiny pieces and added fried milk. She boiled him in a pan and then ate, slowly. Afterward she rocked back on her heels and savored the pleasure of her new life: she was warm, well-fed and owned a place of her own. She could dig clams each morning and then learn about saving barnacles next. On a cold day she could tack the ropes high and put the tarps across the opening. She could keep her memory in its place; she could be perfect, like a pioneer.

Now Laura's days were as smooth as a pool before an incoming tide. Small stomach aches came at times but mostly her nights were sweet and long. Her best days came with the red sun setting or with new, special treasures from the beach. Once she found a shell, as big as a baseball, curled with the sound of the sea inside. Some days there were whole sand dollars, other days new containers or perfect driftwood. On rainy days she'd arrange all the shells or organize water containers to make sure

she had enough for long storms. Some she'd use to contain too many clams, coming in great numbers. The fire always burned and wet clothing dried and stiffened for each new day. The only thing she missed some days was a new magazine or a long book.

One day Laura found a bird. Huddled behind a log, his body was black with oil and grime. Laura carried him home and found a box. She washed him first with salt water, then set him in his home and crammed a few clams down his throat. He made funny noises, like an old dog, and blinked at her with his yellow eyes. Laura laughed.

That evening, as she sat at the cave's edge, Laura thought about Bruce. He had hated pets. He'd said they brought diseases into the house. No dogs, he'd said, or cats either. Now she had a bird and he'd be horrified. She giggled again. Behind her the bird turned his narrow head. After awhile a cool breeze rose from the chilly earth and Laura wrapped herself in an old jacket. She tied her arms across her chest and noticed that her breasts were sore. The curse, she thought, it was time and here she'd forgotten all about it. Her breasts felt funny. At home Bruce would have noticed. But here she was, alone. Now she had to find a way to treat the mess of the curse but what did pioneer women do? A towel or a rag? What an inconvenience for a pioneer woman; not the kind of strength men had.

The next morning was worse. Laura woke from her song dream with light nausea. She turned her head into the pillow and tried to go back to sleep. She wanted a sweet dream again but behind her the bird began to make loud noises and she opened her eyes. He was her responsibility. She dressed and the nausea faded. She went for a walk. What would the bird want? Seaweed? Clams? Barnacles? She didn't know but she collected

anything she thought might work. While she wandered she thought of a name for him. Ivan, a dignified name and bird-like. Back at home she fed him and noticed how he turned his skinny neck, stretched it too, and how his yellow eyes blinked.

While Ivan gobbled his food, Laura made a fresh fire and heated a can of corned beef. She was tired of clams. She was also tired of corned beef. She thought about barnacles or maybe even a fish or a seal. How would she get one? She'd have to think and make a careful plan. She would work it out, like a man. At the moment being a pioneer woman annoyed her as her breasts still hurt and now her stomach bloated as well. There was no curse yet and for two days she had had this annoying sore. It hurt to wrap sweaters and sometimes she felt like staying in bed. She wondered if it was food: was she eating herself sick? Or just getting fat, like a big hog? Actually, she hadn't seen herself in days, in weeks. She'd used plastic containers to wash, done her hair only every so often and never used the mirror. Suddenly she was curious: what did she look like these days? Was she tough and pioneer-like or lovely in some kind of novel-type? Had she changed totally or was she romantic, an isolated woman? Suddenly she threw off her pants and shirt and went to find the mirror. It was hidden and filthy under a collection of rotting seaweed.

Laura looked first at her face and was startled. It was rough, the skin reddish, her lips chapped. No makeup, she thought, but at least a pioneer-type face. Next she ran the mirror up and down her arms: they were stained and seemed bigger, like a man's. But her breasts were odd: swollen and the nipples blue in an odd way. Something she remembered but pushed away. Maybe like a National Geographic woman, she thought, who

carries babies all day. She gazed at her stomach and it was bulgy, not flat, but pushed out after a woman's long meal. Quickly she ran the mirror over her legs and then wanted to laugh at the long, dark hair. Bruce would have complained. She hadn't let that hair grow since she was thirteen. Still, she went back to her belly again and stared at its puffiness and then to her breasts with their blue swelling. These were wrong somehow, she didn't want it. She wanted a strong, lean body, a body quick and smooth and perfect. Instead she had these pushed parts. They made her shiver.

Suddenly Laura felt the nausea, a rapid one. Quickly she dressed, tied her shoes, grabbed her jacket but the nausea grew until she realized she had to vomit. It came up rapidly and she ran to a hole in the cave and began to go; it came over and over and a memory rose in her throat and in her mouth. Bruce. That night before she left, that last night in the bed with no memory and he rubbed her and asked and she gave in and it all came back about the breasts and the belly and the worse memory: the beast inside her.

After the vomiting Laura slipped to the floor. All this time...how long? Weeks now, five or six? A beast inside her. All this time, the creature, eating her food, taking her warmth, making her sleep last too long, knowing her secrets, her dreams. Making her vomit. She hadn't known and the vomit...she'd wanted it to be food...but her husband had left it in her...had kept her. She hated him.

Laura curled and wanted to die. She wanted her life in the cave to last forever: no one else, no husband, no trap. She remembered the other one, the first one and the pain of its death and the time afterwards when

she wanted to die. Here that Bruce had trapped her again and she hated him. Now she had a new monster, trapping her too. What if it died, all rotted up inside her, white and stinking like those dead seals on the beach? Or worse, what if it lived and came out, shrieking, hanging on to her body, kicking her? Afterwards it would want more of her, her time always, her days, her dreams. There it would be, crawling through her cave, pulling and tearing or maybe falling from the edge: screaming, lying broken at the bottom, bloody and broken.

Now Laura gritted her teeth and crawled to the bag. Inside she pulled it high and turned to see the sky. Its color was blank: no face. She closed her eyes. A memory of hugeness came over her. Huge belly, huge breasts, huge monsters. She closed her eyes and, after awhile, slept. Her dreams came of cows and pigs, thundering towards her, then of a windshield smeared with blood. When she woke the nausea was gone but she was exhausted. Too tired to rise for a fire, to eat. From his own box Ivan made his noises but Laura went back to sleep.

In a day Laura woke and raised herself but she was overcome with dizziness. Making the daily fire was an enormous task, hunting for firewood made her too tired. The washing stream seemed too far away and her hair grew lanky. Her teeth were covered with the night's bad dreams and she vomited often. Her food came only from the end of the cold cans. She turned her face from the sky. Ivan was horribly greedy, stretching his long neck over the box, taking whatever she gave him, croaking and screeching. She began to hate him and moved his box to the opening of the cave, hoping he would get well enough to fly off.

For days now she hated to eat. She knew that whatever she ate, it

ate, whatever she drank, it drank. She knew that this thing inside grew until days when it seemed to fill her, her lungs, her heart, her stomach. When she stood, her legs shook and she thought the thing inside her had arms grown long enough to fill her bones. Now the fog rolled in from the sea, into the cave. Rain curtained the opening, small holes inside filled with water. Her cans of food rusted, her containers of clams went sour. One morning Laura crawled to the bird and gave him all the clams, dozens of them. She hated him.

Small holes in the floor smelled like the beach. The sea's voice was muted and one afternoon things danced on Laura's stomach until she woke, screaming. This thing must die, she thought; it takes my life away. It brings horrors, it is a large insect living in my home, it brings rain, it drowns my sun, it makes me lost from a pioneer life.

That day she didn't rise at all. When the bird cried for food she covered her ears. Over and over she slipped into a boneless sleep. When she woke she thought, how? There would be a horrid pain, like before. She knew it all. She had been there. But she would do it again, with a wire she'd found on the sand, poking and poking until she found that hole where Bruce had left his seed, that entrance he knew. She would raise her legs in his way, the way Bruce wanted, and when she was ready, she would stab as hard as she could. The cramps would come in circles, running up and down her legs and her hips, lasting a long time, long enough for screams but she wouldn't. Just that one perfect stab and it would slip out, quickly. Quickly and dead.

In the following dream she found herself in pools of blood, warm like a bath. In the dream the fog rolled away and the sky was blue and the fire

snapped and her legs were warm and strong. She felt like flying, once again, over the sea. The baby was gone and had never been and now she had what she wanted: everything her own way, everything in her own order. After long hours she woke all covered with heat. She was confused. Was there blood all over her? But she felt and it was sweat on her legs and her body was twisted and tangled in the sleeping bag. Rain had soaked her. She undid herself. Things had changed. The cave was silent. The fire was chilled. Her home smelled, like something undefined, like a childhood toy.

After a long time Laura pulled herself from her sleeping bag and stood up. What had been wrong before? It must have been the clams; she hated them and they made her sick. Outside the cave she could see the sky clearing; pieces of purple battled with storm clouds. She needed food; she needed to go to the store. What store? She could walk since she had no car. Bruce used it; pioneers had no cars. Or she could get barnacles to eat or even a seal or a sea lion. In her boat. As a pioneer she must have a boat. She would make a boat. Winter was coming but she would arrange the tarp to keep out the storm. Enough wood collected and sea meat and she'd be ready to live out through all the winter until the heat returned from the summer once more. She would be tight and so strong and able to do anything. During those long winter days she would think, all day, or dream and be creative. Maybe she could learn how to build animal clothing. Or something else. She smiled.

Laura looked around the cave. It needed rearranging for the cold days. Food must be kept higher, meat must be preserved. A bed up from the floor. She spotted the box by the cave lip. Inside was a dead bird,

its body stiff, its yellow eyes ugly and staring. She couldn't remember why a bird was in her cave. Disgusted, she tossed it out, as far as she could throw so it landed near the incoming tide. She watched until the seventh wave captured and dragged it away. For some beast to feed on, she thought. A seal or a sea lion.
